

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Maire Atherton / Emeline Evans
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The service is a four-bedded children's home registered for boys with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The home is owned and operated by a private organisation that specialises in the assessment and treatment of male adolescents who have experienced some form of abuse and have subsequently been involved in perpetrating abusive behaviour themselves.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **adequate**.

Since the last inspection there has been a wholesale change in the staff team, with a new manager and four new staff. Some, including the manager, were already known by the young people due to their work within the organisation in other roles. They have quickly formed a cohesive team, working consistently with the young people to their individual care plans. The staff have also built positive relationships with the young people, resulting in a reduction in the frequency of challenging behaviour and the use of sanctions.

Young people have mixed views on the quality of care in the home and the progress they are making and this correlates with how well they are engaging with the therapeutic programme. They all feel safe in the home, and for some this is a considerable achievement in light of their starting points, although progress is not well evidenced in the records. Where staff have concerns about lack of progress action is taken to review placements.

The manager is leading the staff team effectively and they are working together to a detailed action plan to address the weaknesses of the service. Further work on risk assessments, planning family contact and aspects of staff training have been recommended as a result of this inspection.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- evidence the progress of young people in achieving the targets set in their individual placement plans to show how they are developing (NMS 2)
- ensure staff are trained in supervising and facilitating contact, so as to improve planning and outcomes for all involved (NMS 9.2)
- ensure that the placement plan and the risk management plan cross reference accurately and that the control measures in place are sufficiently robust (NMS 4.5)
- evidence, and evaluate for effectiveness annually, the learning and development programme for staff. (NMS 18.1 and 18.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **adequate**.

Young people's progress is variable, both by their own account and that of the placing authorities. One young person said 'Therapy is really helping me, I am working well with my individual worker.' One placing social worker expressed concern at the apparent lack of progress by a young person. Another said 'He has a structure and routine...he has healthy relationships with staff and peers, which he didn't before. He is now able to have a childhood.' There are positive attachments between the young people and the staff and these are supporting progress.

Young people's health needs are well met. They have a good awareness of a healthy lifestyle and in the main choose to act on their knowledge, for example they have a balanced diet, exercise regularly and 'choose not to smoke because it's not good for me'. Young people's medication is also reviewed, leading to a reduction for some.

All young people are in full-time education and benefit from education programmes tailored to individual need, ability and changing circumstances. Their attendance is good and supports progress.

Young people talk positively about the activities they enjoy with staff, gardening has become a regular pastime for some. One young person commented that his birthday was 'the best day ever'. Membership of local clubs, football and drama in particular, enables young people to develop social skills outside the home environment.

Young people maintain appropriate contact with family members and people important to them within any agreed restrictions. Some feel this is really well managed and supported by staff but this is not the case for all.

Young people develop self-care and independence skills while at the home. They share daily household chores such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry, which they feel gives them useful skills. Young people learn how to negotiate to achieve transition through the programme, applying for discretion to achieve increased freedom. They learn to budget through using their individual allowances to buy clothing and personal items. This enables them to practice independence skills in a supportive environment which they will need to use when living independently.

Quality of care

The quality of the care is **adequate**.

The newly constituted staff team have established positive relationships with the young people in a relatively short space of time. The relationships between the young people themselves are mixed, with competition and conflict a regular feature. Staff are proactive in identifying potential conflict and intervene to distract and divert the young people into more positive behaviour. The number of incidents is decreasing and the therapy team are leading a clear plan of work with the young people and the staff team to further reduce these.

Young people are confident in expressing their views and say their opinions have influenced decisions in the home, for example, the colour scheme in the lounge, activities and meal choices. Weekly house meetings provide a regular opportunity for discussions, where all are encouraged to contribute. Young people know how to complain and feel that complaints are taken seriously and acted on where possible. Where staff cannot act on their wishes in the way the young people would like, staff ensure they explain why this is the case. Some young people understand and accept the explanations better than others.

Individual placement plans are comprehensive and of a very good standard. There is core group meeting every three weeks for each young person. The core group consists of the young person, and a consistent representative from the therapy team, the education team and the residential team. Some, but not all young people, attend these meetings. The keyworker role in the home is yet to be embedded in practice and the job description is under revision. Each young person has their own version of the plan from which they devise daily goals, to work towards their overall targets set in the placement plan. Their achievements are evaluated daily in a group meeting by themselves, their peers and the staff on duty. The current format of recording placement plans does not evidence well the progress made by young people in achieving the targets set.

Staff have to manage some complex contact arrangements to enable young people to keep in touch with family. Some families are satisfied with the management of these arrangements, others would prefer better planning, with a contingency plan in place so that contact is a positive and enjoyable experience for all those involved. Staff are briefed on, but do not receive formal training in, supervising and facilitating contact.

Staff are proactive in promoting the health of each young person. Young people are supported to attend routine health appointments and the systems for the storage and administration of medication are robust. The organisation has an established therapeutic programme in place, overseen by a consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist and clearly outlined in the Statement of Purpose. Young people's needs are identified and a representative from the therapeutic, residential and education teams form a core group to work collaboratively with the young person towards addressing these needs. Young people are supported to engage in the process, some do so more willingly than others, despite the efforts of the team.

Staff support young people in their education. Young people have good attendance at the organisation's school. Some have the opportunity to attend courses off site, car maintenance for example. When young people are struggling with education alternative strategies are devised. The manager has identified communication between the education and residential staff as an area for improvement, particularly when alternative arrangements are in place, so as to provide staff with a clearer framework of support to each young person.

Staff provide young people with support and encouragement to participate in a range of activities, both individually and as a group. Some activities, for example music lessons and going to drama club, reflect the interests and skills of the young people and provide enjoyable personal development opportunities.

The home is in an established residential area giving young people easy access to local shops, community facilities and public transport. The house is clean, well maintained and homely, providing young people with warm, comfortable accommodation which they are involved in personalising.

Safeguarding children and young people

The service is **good** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

Young people say they feel safe in the home, which given their starting points is a significant achievement. Staff are vigilant in their supervision of young people. They also encourage young people to understand and accept their own responsibility in keeping themselves safe, working within the therapeutic framework. A minority of young people placed are resistant to this, challenging staff to keep them safe. The manager has improved the risk assessment process since the last inspection. However a recent incident highlighted a deficit in a control measure and one issue identified in a risk management plan was not linked with the placement plan. This means that staff are not fully equipped to manage an aspect of the potential behaviour of young people.

The manager has a good working relationship with the Local Authority Designated Officer, liaises and acts on advice appropriately. Staff are regularly trained in and know how to implement child protection procedures should they have or be made aware of any safeguarding concerns.

Young people feel that any instances of bullying are usually managed well by staff. They also say that staff make sure they get any treatment needed if they have an accident. There have been no occasions when young people have been reported as missing from the home since the last inspection. The manager has established links with the local police, who have approved the missing person procedures.

The manager and the new staff team have reviewed behaviour management in the home since starting work in the home. There is a no restraint policy in place and where behaviour has been viewed by previous staff as requiring restraint the police have been called. This has not happened since the appointment of the new team. The manager attributes this to the different responses of the team to challenging behaviour, with a much stronger emphasis on care and nurture, rather than preparation for independence. In addition there is on-going input from the therapy team to look at different ways to reduce aggressive behaviour. In the current work young people are meeting with therapists to look at building anger management strategies, while staff are focusing on parenting techniques. This has also resulted in a reduction in the number of sanctions issued. The young people say sanctions are fair. Since the last inspection there has been an improvement in the recording of sanctions and better evaluation of how effective they are.

There has been a positive recruitment drive with many new appointments made to residential support worker posts. Recruitment practices are robust, ensuring that only those deemed suitable are employed to work in the home. Young people are actively involved in the recruitment of staff and speak positively about their contribution to the process.

Young people benefit from a physically safe environment. Routine safety checks and maintenance of fire safety, gas and electrical systems and equipment are undertaken as required. Any damage is repaired as promptly as possible.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the children's home are **good**.

Since the last inspection the Registered Manager has resigned and a new manager has been appointed. An application for registration has been received by Ofsted. The new manager holds a senior management role within the organisation and was well known to all the young people prior to taking on this role. The new manager has made good progress in addressing the requirements made in the last report in a relatively short time. The manager has developed a detailed action plan and is working on its implementation to address the weaknesses identified. The manager is also reviewing the format of the monthly monitoring visit so that there is more of a focus on evaluation and improvement of the service. Complaints and concerns are responded to appropriately and reviewed as part of the regular management monitoring.

The manager has reviewed and updated the Statement of Purpose to reflect the

changes in the staff team. The young people, staff and placing authorities understand the aims and objectives of the home and the therapeutic framework. The majority feel that these are being met. Where there are reservations the manager is working with the placing authority. Staff are aware of the impact that living in the home is having on the young people and, where there are concerns about a lack of progress or engagement in the process, action is taken to look at the way forward, including placement review. All young people living in the home have up-to-date looked after children's reviews, at which the organisation takes their own minutes, as often the Chair's summary of the review is significantly delayed.

All, bar one, members of staff who were working in the home at the time of the last inspection have either moved to other homes within the organisation or left. The manager has reviewed the staffing of the home and made appointments in light of the presenting needs of the young people. The staff have quickly engaged to form an effective and consistent team. New staff are very well supported through a robust induction programme and on-going support and training to complete the completion of the Children's Workforce Development Council induction standards within six months. There are good systems in place to ensure that staff training is refreshed when necessary. However there is not a comprehensive written learning and development programme of staff training. Staff benefit from regular supervision and weekly staff meetings that provide them with structured support to fulfil their respective roles in the team.

There has been an improvement in the consistency of staff in the home. At the time of the inspection two team members were still within their probationary period so on occasion were supported by experienced staff from within the organisation. Staffing levels are sufficient to meet the needs of the young people. There is a robust on call system which can provide additional support if needed.

Records are orderly, well maintained and up to date. Staff and young people can contribute to and access the information they need

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the *Inspections of children's homes – framework for inspection* and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of children's homes.